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ABSTRACT

For second-language learners, the narration of highly personal experiences that entail strong affective relations relies on the conceptual processes underlying language. Relating personal narratives in a second language may be a highly successful communicative use of language even though extensive linguistic information for that language is lacking. Expression of the conceptual aspect becomes critical. A comparison of the narrations by two Vietnamese brothers of their departure from Vietnam and their development of a new life in the United States indicates the powerful role of psychosocial dynamics in second language acquisition, which can set up either positive or inhibiting conditions for second language development. The use of spoken personal narratives that draw on the dynamics of immigration and resettlement appears to be an indicator of active engagement of second language acquisition processes. Findings suggest that second language acquisition researchers and practitioners should look beyond the acquisition of forms and functions to gain further insight into the acquisition process. (MSE)

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PSYCHO-SOCIAL DYNAMICS IN SECOND LANGUAGE ACQUISITION: A CASE STUDY OF VIETNAMESE BROTHERS

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PSYCHO-SOCIAL DYNAMICS IN SECOND LANGUAGE ACQUISITION: A CASE STUDY OF VIETNAMESE BROTHERS*

Carolyn Kessler
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> You know...uh...I don't have birthday since I left my country...[laugh]. If I stay in Vietnam now, I all the ...[inaudible]...cake, cake. I maybe have twenty candle...[laugh]. Because when communist come...came into the South, my family have a cus-...a new custom. When you live in...with communist one year, you have... [laugh], you [laugh] have two candle.

Personal narratives such as this of a 15-year-old Vietnamese boy now living in the United States describe aspects of sociocultural and psychological factors that appear to have influenced the acquisition of English-as-a-second-language (ESL) during the first year of resettlement in the United States. Narratives of personal experience, as Labov (1972) defines them, are those "in which the speaker becomes deeply involved in rehearsing or even reliving events of his past" (p. 354). Because the experience and emotions involved in recounting these life events form an integral part of the speaker's life stories, the narrator seems to relive those experiences so intensely that processes of monitoring speech are generally abandoned. For second-language learners the narrative of such a personal experience may be expected to reveal aspects of the second-language acquisition process occurring as the language user focuses on meaning.

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Unplanned spoken discourse narratives of personal experiences are seen here as an extension of the position expressed by Hatch (1978) and Scollon and Scollon (1981) that language acquisition evolves out of learning how to carry on conversations. Learning how to interact verbally for second-language development, whether in the setting of a conversation or of personal narratives, helps learners enter into complex language experiences that trigger language acquisition processes.

When using L_1 or L_2, not all experiences are the same. As Bialystok (1981b) points out, the focus may vary differentially, on meaning or form, on precision or fluency, on logic or rhetoric. Bialystok (1981a), discussing relationships between knowledge sources and language tasks, hypothesizes a quantitative decrease in the amount of purely linguistic information necessary for language tasks that are increasingly instrumental, using not only grammatical but also discursive and conceptual language aspects. This decrease in linguistic information will likely be compensated by greater reliance on conceptual information. Relating personal narratives is a highly complex process in which linguistic, conceptual, experiential knowledge, and affective responses to this knowledge interact.

For second-language learners, the narration of highly personal experiences that entail strong affective reactions relies on the conceptual processes underlying language. Relating personal narratives in a second language may be a highly successful communicative use of language, even though extensive linguistic information for that language is relatively lacking. Expression of the conceptual aspect becomes critical. As Chafe (1980) suggests, thinking involves three major components: information, self, and consciousness. Information draws on knowledge from many sources, including psychosocial perception of the world around the speaker. Additionally, information

includes memory and affect--emotions, feelings, attitudes associated with what is perceived and remembered. Self may be defined as the "executive" who provides central control over what happens and who has a variety of needs, goals, and interests. The third component, consciousness, is the mechanism by which the self uses information. It is an important notion to both linguistics and psychology and plays a crucial role in language use.

The psychological notion of consciousness relates to the linguistic notion of given information, that which speakers assume to be already present in the listener's consciousness, and new information, which they assume is not. The functioning of language depends fundamentally on the assumptions of what is shared, or given information for both interlocutors, and what is new, or not in the listener's consciousness. Communication begins with the information that enters the speaker's consciousness and proceeds with the selection and transmission of certain parts that enter as new material into the addressee's consciousness. In this process, a primary purpose for language use to increase the amount of knowledge shared by separate minds is accomplished (Chafe, 1974).

The focus of this paper is to describe how aspects of consciousness are realized for the second-language learner, particularly as these intersect with the psycho-social dynamics of immigration and resettlement in a new language and culture. Learning how information is verbalized and how units of language reflect underlying processes may give insights into the process of second-language acquisition and reveal relationships between first and second language use. Specifically, this study deals with the narration of two young Vietnamese boys' departure from Vietnam and their development of a new life in the United States.

SUBJECTS

The subjects for this study were two Vietnamese brothers, Thay, aged 15, and Lai, 16. These ethnic Chinese youths, along with an older brother, had left Vietnam, their parents, and five other siblings as part of the "boat people" migration from Vietnam to Malaysia. They spent eight months in the Bidong Island refugee camps before their arrival in Texas. Bilingual in Chinese and Vietnamese, they had studied English only minimally for one school year in Vietnam. When they arrived in the United States, they were still at a beginning level of English proficiency.

Data collection took place over ten weeks in the fall of 1981, beginning seven months after the brothers arrived in the United States and enrolled in a high school in a middle to upper-middle class area of San Antonio, Texas. They began a regular curriculum of math, science, social studies, and physical education in addition to an ESL class. The school setting was the primary source of English-language input. Both their living situation and part-time work in a Chinese restaurant provided little opportunity to hear or speak English.

Two of the investigators for this study provided a weekly tutorial service to the boys, giving them a personal, one-to-one opportunity to interact in English on topics that interested or concerned them. These sessions took place for one hour per week and provided the data collected here. All sessions were tape-recorded and later transcribed. In these sessions, the subjects engaged for the first time in extensive English interactions in a setting conducive to personal narratives. Lack of English use outside school and focus on academic issues within school had constrained the use of English markedly before this data collection began.

THE REFUGEE EXODUS: A BACKGROUND

In 1978, before diplomatic relations with China were broken, and as the postwar economic conditions worsened, a mass exodus of Vietnamese refugees began. From April 1978 to June 1979, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) estimated that more than a million refugees fled Vietnam (**Le Nouvel Observateur**, 1979). Of this total, only 600,000 reached their destination. More than 400,000 were thought to have perished at sea or died of disease. After the 1979 invasion of Vietnam by China, the Hanoi government adopted a new policy toward the ethnic Chinese citizens of the country. They would henceforth be considered "undesirables" and given the choice to either leave for the new economic zones or emigrate. UNHCR reports estimate that more than 800,000 Chinese nationals chose to leave Vietnam in the first six months of 1979. Later in 1980-1981, they were joined by increasingly larger numbers of Vietnamese, including many teenage boys from the South who did not want to fight in Kampuchea (**New York Review of Books**, 1981).

Trying to stem the tide of refugee exodus, the UNHCR set up a program in Vietnam called "orderly departure," a program that failed partly because the government refused to issue exit visas, even though refugees had obtained entry visas to other countries. Corruption in the Hanoi government compounded the problem. Consequently, the more certain and cheaper way to leave Vietnam was by boat at a cost of about 2,000 United States dollars per person in bribes. The fact that hundreds of thousands of Vietnamese paid for their passage with life savings; willingly faced the known and terrible dangers of both storms and Thai pirates who raped, stole, and murdered at will; and left

behind family and loved ones is further evidence that the boat people were participants in an event of human suffering of untold proportions.

Thay and Lai, with their older brother, left Vietnam in a small boat, escaping detection by Vietnamese gunboats. In one of his narratives (1), Thay conveys some of the psychic stress his parents were under at the time of their sons' departure.

> (1) Fish man told...told my parents because my parents scared we...we...we would meet...meet trouble on the sea. Uh...but the fish man say "This weather is good to leave Vietnam."

At sea, Thay and his brothers were attacked by Thai pirates who stole all their possessions, including the gold chains their parents had given them. When they reached Malaysia, all they owned were the clothes on their backs.

The realities of separation from family are described in Thay's narrative (2).

> (2) I feel terrible sad...because I know...uh...I knew, I knew, I knew when I lef...I leave Vietnam I don't know at what time I can...uh...see my family again [laugh]. I know...I don't know. May...maybe never [laugh] see my family again.

The difficult stay in the refugee camp on Bidong Island is summarized in the continued narration (3) by Thay.

> (3) I feel bad the whole time because I miss my family.... In the refugee camp [illegible].I wrote about...uh...the three of us wrote a letter about a hundred letter, a hundred letters. But my parents when they send... uh...letter to me, they say...uh...we only receive of your only one letter.

When Thay and Lai arrived in San Antonio, Texas, they immediately wrote their parents to tell them they were safe in the United States. Commenting on the five-month delay in receiving a reply, Thay offers observations (4) about the postal system under communist direction.

(4) Because when you send the letter to Vietnam, the communist suppose in the letter have money [laugh] uh... like...uh...American money. Then they take it slowly and sometime they take...take all of the letter. If have money in it, they took the money and throw it away, the letter.

Thay and Lai are acutely aware of the life-endangering situation that has threatened their family. They see the communists as a malevolent power, keeping them in a semi-permanent state of fear for their personal and familial safety, even after their resettlement in San Antonio.

Many Vietnamese boat people experienced grave psycho-social trauma during migration and resettlement in which a protracted life-endangering situation had been accompanied by a constant fear of annihilation (Jimenez, 1980). Many experienced disturbed sleep patterns. They dreamt that they were again children, at a time and place when all was happy before tragedy struck. Premonitions of terror and death also stalked them in their sleep. Anxiety and dread over losing all security assaulted them in the long waiting period in refugee resettlement camps. Past loss and horrible memories intensified fears about the future. On arriving in the United States, these refugees of the late 1970s and early 1980s attempted to constrict time to the immediate past and the near future. The remote past was a time which many chose not to think about, concerning themselves instead with building new lives. But when language and culture shock set in, the ability to speak English suddenly becomes an unattainable goal, and refugees fear they will never survive in the new culture.

The following exchange (5) between Lai and one of the investigators (I) indicates this frustration.

(5) I: You said you wanted to be an engineer and he [Thay] said he wanted to be a doctor.

Lai: [laugh]

I: So I told him that he could be a doctor.

Lai: Oh. [laugh]

I: You know, don't ever...don't ever think that the English will be a barrier because it won't.

Lai: But now I...I don't think...I will be engineer [laugh] because my English...I know my English is bad.

Language has become for Lai an insurmountable barrier to realizing both his and his brother's aspirations, even though he spends nearly all his free time studying English. The futility comes out in example (6).

(6) I: Do you understand what you read?

Lai: Yes, I don't understand most of it.

Frustration with second-language acquisition is evident in Thay's comments (7) on trying to learn English and how he feels about his progress.

(7) I: And when you listen back to yourself on tape, do you hear your mistakes?

Thay: I didn't...I didn't know where am I wrong.

I: What do you find when you listen? What do you listen for?

Thay: I listen how to make a sentence.

I: And does it help your confidence? Do you feel more confident about your English?

Thay: When I hear, I feel my English is bad [laugh]....

I: Do you feel...

Thay: [upset?

I: upset?]

Thay: Yes.

In response to fears, refugees typically expend new energy in combating despair, diverting concentration away from more creative uses. This depletes

resilience for adjustment strategies. Imperceptibly, an invisible screen is erected between themselves and the new environment in order to selectively filter out anxiety-provoking elements. The screen also sets up greater social distance between refugees and the new society, limiting the feedback necessary for survival and adaptation (Jimenez, 1980). This lessens the chances of hearing and responding to native speakers of English in a wide variety of settings. Thay reveals an aspect of his frustration (8) and what he sees as the most reasonable solution to his situation.

> (8) I wish my country will kill the communists and I come back because this language [English] is not my and I cannot speak.

The need to narrate the experiences that have exacted powerful emotional responses and changed the directions of one's life are particularly evident in the younger Thay, who found in his tutor-interviewer someone to whom he could relate in spite of linguistic differences. The older boy, Lai, appeared less willing, or ready, to look back. His consuming concern was to acquire English and achieve success.

CONSCIOUSNESS IN SECOND-LANGUAGE NARRATIVES

Discourse form, as Bernardo (1980) summarizes, is ultimately dependent on purposeful and cognitive behavior. As the former, discourse acts are the result of the speaker's intention, such as the expression of specific elements of information. As cognitive behavior, discourse processes are dependent upon structures of the mind. Discourse largely involves the expression of conceptual information, such as memories of past experiences, knowledge, new thoughts, and ongoing perceptions. This, to use Chafe's (1980) model, is the information aspect of thought. It is this information that self can make use of through the mechanism of consciousness.

The functioning of language depends fundamentally on how consciousness is realized in language use. Part of this includes assessment of the listener's consciousness in which the speaker relies heavily on assumptions about shared information. Other aspects reflect properties of consciousness itself.

Consciousness is highly limited in capacity, the amount of information that can be activated at any one moment. It is highly limited in duration, or the time it can focus on one piece of information. It is jerky, moving in spurts as it scans information. Finally, it has both a central focus and a periphery, providing maximum degree of activation as well as lesser degrees. Consciousness operates on an underlying type of cognitive entity or center of interest, which is not governed, however, by limitations of capacity and duration (Chafe, 1980).

Conceptual material, then, may be described as being in consciousness or not. When it is being attended to, it is activated. When it is not, it may be thought of as stored memory. The form in which it is activated is particularly relevant for insights into second-language use.

When activated, conceptual material appears as unified pieces or chunks, which often have names, such as birthday, communists, refugee camps, my parents, etc. (Bernardo, 1980). The conceptual material of which chunks are composed appears, according to Bernardo, to be of two types of elements: (1) individual, including particular people, things, etc.; and (2) states and events, relations and interactions among individuals.

Once activated in consciousness, conceptual material may be in the form of either a single event or a set of component events that the speaker conceives of before expressing it to a listener. The entire chunk of Thay's observance of his birthday may be seen in example 9.

(9) I don't have birthday since I left my country.

This leaves open all the details related to reasons why there has not been this celebration. Through the cognitive process of subchunking, component events may be extracted and realized in what Bernardo (1980) terms **minichunks**. Thay's more extended narrative (10) about his birthday shows these products of subchunking.

(10a) You know ..uh...I don't have birthday

(b) since I left my country...[laugh]

(c) If I stay in Vietnam now,

(d) I all the [inaudible] cake, cake

(e) I maybe have twenty candle...[laugh]

(f) Because when communist come...came into the South,

(g) my family have a cus-...a new custom.

(h) When you live in...with communist one year,

(i) you have...[laugh], you [laugh] have two candle.

In this narrative, minichunks are evidenced in examples 10a through 10i. Each may be considered as corresponding to a focus of consciousness extracted from information about the whole experience. The minichunks and the large set of component events comprising the chunk are hypothesized as appearing in a gestalt-like form in the speaker's consciousness, with the more highly activated minichunk in the immediate central focus and the larger chunk in the background or periphery. As Thay moves through the narrative about his birthday, central focus moves from the notion of not celebrating a birthday recently to the communist presence in his country and the impact on the family's observance of birthdays.

In discourse, consciousness here applies both to the minichunk, which serves as the central focus at a particular moment when a small amount of

information is activated, and to the larger chunk having less activation at that point. Furthermore, each minichunk reflects those properties of consciousness that limit the amount of information that can be activated at any one time as well as the duration that can be allocated to each. The content of each minichunk in Thay's narrative suggests much more information than given and would, of course, require much more extensive time allocations.

Just as subchunking is the process of extracting minichunks from a larger amount of information, clausalization is the extraction of individuals, and a relationship between them, from a minichunk (Bernardo, 1980). A minichunk, then, is expressed in discourse as a clause or clauselike expression, containing a verbal phrase and one or more associated noun phrases. In clausalizing a minichunk, a speaker has choices that affect which individuals are extracted and to which noun phrases they are assigned. Clausalization is, then, a corollary process to subchunking, extracting individuals from the minichunk and establishing a relationship between them. In Thay's narrative, he assigns to subject noun phrase position the lexical items **I, communist, family.** One may hypothesize the position of preeminence each of these holds not only in Thay's consciousness as the notion is being used here but also in his entire psycho-social relationship to the upheaval of leaving Vietnam. Thay apparently relates his birthday celebration to the political transformation in his country. While the birthday is seen here as the larger chunk, the communist takeover is the focus of his immediate attention.

The jerky or court-like nature of consciousness is highlighted with such hesitation phenomena as uh in example 10a or interruption in example 10h, self-correction in example 10f, false start in example 10g, and extensive use of laughter throughout the narration. Of particular interest in the narrative is the use of laughter which, as part of its meaning, may signal a

negative affective response to the information brought into consciousness. It appears to serve also as a paralinguistic device to conceal a great deal of sorrow that Thay may experience as he retells this event. This response may at the same time be intersecting with the process of bringing information into consciousness, indicating that Thay is scanning his consciousness to identify and extract the next component of the larger chunk he is narrating. Laughter, then, is a multiple-meaning device. Of particular interest is the use of laughter as a signal for scanning information to be activated in a focus of consciousness. This use of laughter is also suggested in Lai's interaction in example 11.

(11) Responding to a question about a meeting that took place a few days earlier, Lai remarks:

Lai: Uh...we talk about...[laugh] something in the class and...uh...[laugh] about something at home.

I: What did you tell him? What class did you talk about?

Lai: Uh...talk about...uh...uh...students, American students.

I: Oh, really? What did you think?

Lai: [laugh] Friend...uh...I think...[laugh] nothing.

I: You think nothing?

Lai: Yeah...[laugh].

Lai's use of laughter, interspersed with uh suggests the process of scanning stored information to bring aspects of it into consciousness. He stops short of expressing further comments on American students, a strategy somewhat typical of the older brother. Unlike Thay, he consistently moved away from personal narratives on the subjects related to his departure from Vietnam and resettlement in the United States.

In example 12, Thay narrates his perception of the relationship between the new Vietnamese government and the ethnic Chinese population after 1975.

(12a) I: Is there a difference in the way...

(b) Thay: [Yeah, the communists hate

(c) I: they are treated?]

(d) Thay: the Chinese.

(e) I: Why do they hate the Chinese?

(f) Thay: I don't know. Because I...I...I...I have seen to took all the money of the Chinese friend, starving, or business or factory. They took all the thing, all the Chineses and...uh...[7 seconds] took all of them to go to maybe... uh...for-...forest and they don't permit for the Chinese took anything eat. They...uh...go out from their house only clothes they wear on back.

In this account of the treatment of the ethnic Chinese people at the hands of the new Vietnamese government, the processes of subchunking and clausalization are revealed in Thay's simplified code. In example 12f, Thay assigns the pronoun **they**, referring to the post-1975 government in Vietnam, to the subject position of the noun phrases in the different clauses of the minichunks. He may do this because the communist authorities are already more highly activated in his consciousness and, consequently, given the most important position in the clause. Thay brings into consciousness memories of how ethnic Chinese citizens of Vietnam lost all their material possessions, all except the clothes they were wearing, when sent into new economic zones in the forests where they were expected to become farmers and workers. Other observers of Vietnam also note that the Chinese, as holders of a sizable portion of the country's capital, became the targets of a government whose economy was in need of hard currency to meet the country's pressing economic needs (**Background Information on the Ethnic Chinese Refugees**, undated).

Thay, in his simplified code, expresses the complexity of the ethnic Chinese situation in example 12f.

Prior Activation

Bernardo (1986) hypothesizes that when a larger chunk is conceptualized as a set of component events (as with Thay's narrative of the misfortunes of the ethnic Chinese under the new Vietnamese communist government), the individual already more activated in the speaker's consciousness will become the clause subject. Evidence of this prior activation hypothesis can be seen in Thay's consistent assignment of **communists** to subject noun phrase in example 12f. Since **communists** were already the focus of Thay's attention in example 12b, they remain in the foreground of his consciousness as they are extracted into minichunks and clausalized in the noun phrase subject position throughout the discourse.

A further example from second-language narrative data supporting the prior activation hypothesis is observable in Thay's description of the massive exodus of ethnic Chinese from Vietnam. Thay's first-hand account (13) of this period in Vietnamese history describes conditions where very large numbers of ethnic Chinese tried to flee to Malaysia, Indonesia, or elsewhere.

(13a) Thay: And a lot of Chinese, they die.
Dead. On the sea.

(b) I: They died trying to get to Malaysia or Indonesia or some other camp?

(c) Thay: No. They die. They die on...in the sea when they...when they were on the way there. They leave every...they left Vietnam and the weather is bad and have a big wave...big, big.

(d) I: Yeah, big wave...

(e) Thay: Yeah. Because I have seen a boat. There are over 80 people on the boat. Then they begun...began to leave Vietnam in the time the weather is bad. After a few...a few hours and they... Yeah...their boat is broken. And only two or three people is alive...were alive. And...uh...after a few days, you know, the body is lying on the sea. The relative, relative...uh...hire people on the near.

Throughout this narration Thay places **Chinese** in the subject noun phrase. **Body** for the dead and **relative** for the living extension of the dead are all in Thay's consciousness as the **Chinese**.

Interestingly, very few pauses, interruptions, or breaks for laughter occur in this narration. It seems that Thay has no need to scan the component information of this chunk to engage in activating specific aspects of consciousness. Instead, Thay is retelling in his second language an experience with which he is very familiar and which he very possibly has reflected upon and discussed with others in his first language. This suggests that he is using the cognitive principles of subchunking and clausalization in his second language in much the same way as in his first language. Prior activation of this whole chunk in the first language and occasional rehearsal in the second eliminates the need here to pause or hesitate as the scanning processes are carried out.

Salience

When subchunking produces an as yet unclausalized minichunk, Bernardo (1980) hypothesizes that the speaker's attention is directed to participants filling certain semantic roles in the event. He suggests that certain human and causal roles lend salience to individuals. As a result, the likelihood of their being extracted as clause subjects increases as salience increases. Just as Bernardo's data for first-language narratives show high correlation

between individuals playing human and causal roles and individuals expressed as clause subjects, so also do data for second-language personal narratives. Examples from Thay's narratives exemplify the function of salience in selecting subjects.

(13e) And...uh...after a few days, you know, the body is lying on the sea.

This illustrates how the animate object **body** outranks the inanimate object **sea** in the speaker's clausalization of the minichunk.

(13e) The relative, the relative...uh...hire people on the near.

In this example, both **relative** and **people** can assume a human role but, in this context, **relative** holds the causal role of hiring others who perform an instrumental role. Because of its greater salience, **relative** is assigned in the subject noun phrase position. These and other examples from a second language learner's personal narratives indicate that observation of salience operates even in the learner's simplified code in much the way it might be expected to operate in first-language narration. In other words, the salience hypothesis, which explains how the human and causal roles that individuals assume are brought into consciousness, may serve to define how an undivided activated chunk becomes subchunked and clausalized in discourse in general, both for first and second languages.

Scanning Episodes

Narration of personal experiences draws on the way these past events are organized as episodes, each unified by a set of characters, location, and time (Chafe, 1979). This can be brought into consciousness as an activated, undivided chunk. In the process of discourse narration, long hesitations may imply the arrival or departure of a character, a change of location, or a

break in the flow of time. In Thay's second-language narratives, he uses pauses and hesitations frequently. He paused for an especially long time, seven seconds, when he described the Chinese departure from the cities in example 12. This may signal aspects of change in location and, in some respects, change in time and characters. Time and the interval of several days play a role in the pauses seen in the account of the shipwreck (example 13) when people drowned and bodies were left in the sea for several days before being removed by relatives. This use of pause and hesitation may indicate that second-language learners scan their consciousness and apply cognitive principles leading to realization of chunks and minichunks in much the same way that first-language speakers do.

INDIVIDUAL DIFFERENCES

Thay and Lai essentially shared the experiences related by Thay in his personal narratives. The younger boy, however, used almost every opportunity available to narrate these experiences. Although he had the same opportunities as his brother to do so, Lai avoided these narrations. Clearly, what one individual selects to bring into consciousness differs markedly from another's choices, even when the information is shared. This aspect of language use, beyond the scope of this study, points up the extent of individual variation in language use.

In contrast to Thay's eagerness to narrate his experiences, Lai remained absorbed and frustrated with the need to acquire English. Over the entire period of data collection, exchanges such as the following (14) continued to occur:

(14) Lai: I want to be engineer. But now I know I can't because my English very bad. I can't study.

Lai never indicated willingness to relate the experiences he and Thay shared.

At the time data collection started, both brothers scored at approximately the same level of English language proficiency, as measured by the **Secondary Level English Proficiency (SLEP)** test administered at the beginning of the school year. Lai ranked in the 30th percentile in the overall score, Thay in the 33rd percentile. However, in a second administration of the test at the close of the Fall semester, Thay far outscored his brother, ranking in the 71st percentile. Lai's overall score, though showing gains, was considerably behind Thay's at the 49th percentile.

This variation raises crucial issues for second-language acquisition. The hypothesis offered here is that telling personal narratives, the eagerness to take risks in trying to use English in natural discourse situations and to experiment with the language over a range of topics in a naturalistic setting, is at the heart of Thay's success with English. Lai's overriding concern with "getting English" in fact blocked second-language acquisition. He, too, needed to tell personal narratives and participate extensively in conversations covering a wide range of topics interesting and relevant to him. As it was, the specific set of conditions relating consciousness and language use in narrating personal experiences were not operating for him. The consequences are suggested in the differences in the SLEP scores.

SUMMARY

Relating personal narratives in spoken discourse appears to have positively influenced the acquisition of English as a second language for Thay. The absence of such narratives in the spontaneous spoken discourse of Lai may indicate a factor accounting for his somewhat slower rate of English acquisition.

Thay, the 15-year-old brother who actively engaged in personal narratives, appeared to engage mechanisms that correspond closely to those used in first-language narration: mechanisms that relate self, information, and consciousness. This study has focused on the specific details of expressing personal narratives in a second language, examining how closely the activation of consciousness in a second language corresponds to that of the first language.

Any attempt to analyze the relationship between consciousness and language use is still very speculative for first language and, more so, for second language. However, the processes connecting consciousness and language use suggested for first language parallel closely those used to learn a second language. This suggests that aspects of the relationship between consciousness and language use may be universal, at least those identified by Chafe (1980) and Bernardo (1980). The activation of conceptual material or information with the subsequent processes of subchunking and clausalization correspond remarkably to those suggested for first-language realization.

It is important to learn how engaging in processes that bring information into consciousness affects second-language acquisition. The limited data from two brothers who shared the same life experiences, including a range of psycho-social dynamics interacting with their departure from Vietnam and resettlement in the United States, suggest the powerful role that these events play in second-language development. For Thay, who extensively used the mechanisms relating self and information in the telling of personal narratives, there seems to have been a resoundingly positive impact on second-language acquisition. For Lai, who did not bring these same events into consciousness and, consequently, does not engage in the discourse narrative processes, the impact appears to suggest slower second-language acquisition.

Results of this study indicate the powerful role of psycho-social dynamics in second-language acquisition. From the data of two brothers who shared the same traumatic experiences of leaving their home and family in Vietnam and resettling in the United States, the psycho-social dynamics of migration and resettlement in a new language and culture may set up either positive or inhibiting conditions for second-language development. Use of spoken personal narratives that draw on these dynamics appears to be an indicator of active engagement of second-language acquisition processes. This is demonstrated in the extensive language development for Thay, who successfully brings past experiences into consciousness even though certain linguistic information is lacking, and in the slower rate of acquisition for Lai, who does not engage in the process of relating personal narratives but is deeply concerned with acquiring English. Findings suggest that second-language researchers and practitioners should look beyond the acquisition of forms and functions to gain deeper insights into the process of acquiring a second language.

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